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ABSTRACT

The study involving 60 children (grades 2 to 3) tested the hypothesis that both aggressive and withdrawn children would benefit from participating in brief daily learning sessions with peers having similar behavioral problems. Ss were divided into three groups: tutors, tutees, and controls. Tutors learned how to correct and reinforce their "students" in an easygoing and non-hostile manner and were given freedom to manipulate content materials of each session, and were allowed to meet with their tutees as often as they wanted. After 5 weeks of peer tutoring, almost all children who actively participated in the program showed higher self concepts and greater behavioral improvements than the controls. In addition, they demonstrated a renewed interest in school and in the learning process. (Author/SBH)

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"I MUST BE GOOD IF I CAN TEACH!" -- PEER TUTORING WITH AGGRESSIVE AND WITHDRAWN CHILDREN

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Abstract

This study tested the hypothesis that both aggressive and withdrawn children would benefit from participating in brief daily learning sessions with peers having similar behavioral problems. In particular, the study looked for gains in self-concept and in the children's behavioral difficulties... the aggressive would "settle down" and the withdrawn would become more outgoing as a result of peer tutoring.

Sixty children from a Buffalo public school were involved in the study. They were randomly placed into three groups; tutors, tutees, and control. After the random assignments were made, the author met with the tutors for two training sessions. The tutors learned how to correct and reinforce their "students" in an easy going and non-hostile manner. Tutors were given freedom to manipulate content materials of each session and were allowed to meet with their tutees as often as they wanted. After the five weeks of peer tutoring, almost all children who actively participated in the program showed higher gains than the control. They had higher self concepts and made greater behavioral improvements. In addition, they demonstrated a renewed interest in school and in the learning process. A significant correlation was found between gain scores and the number of times participation in the peer tutoring sessions.

Teachers and administrators were in favor of continuing the project with some modification. They felt that the sessions should be more structured and teacher controlled.

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RESEARCH PAPER

"I MUST BE GOOD IF I CAN TEACH!"- PEER TUTORING WITH AGGRESSIVE AND WITHDRAWN CHILDREN

Presented at First World Congress on Future Special Education
CEC, Council For Exceptional Children
Stirling, Scotland
June 25-July 1, 1978
(Seminar 99)

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Background

Prior to completing his master's degree in the field of Learning and Behavioral Disabilities (LBD) from the State University College at Buffalo, the author attended the Rabbinical College of America in Morristown, New Jersey, for a period of 3 years. It was at the Rabbinical College that the author became most fascinated with the style of learning... students studied together in pairs, giving each other direct feedback and reinforcement. Upon questioning the students involved in this unique mode of learning, it was learned that the vast majority of them had participated in public school education from level K through college. These students noted 2 main differences between the Rabbinical College and their previous educational experiences. First of all, they were studying more. Secondly, they reported making greater gains qualitatively under their present circumstances. It was the author's contention that the learning system itself contributed to these reported gains.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, the technique of peer tutoring (PT) has been found to be extremely successful in both the regular school systems and with disadvantaged minority groups in alleviating various personal problems and in increasing academic skills. However, PT has unfortunately not been given its chance to provide these same fruitful benefits for LBD children. It is therefore most important to review the literature on PT to determine if these positive results can generalize to LBD children.

Review of the Literature

Since the practice of PT is a relatively new phenomenon in the public school environment, the majority of studies examining PT are from 1973 till the present. The notion that PT gets students more interested in the school process was verified in a study by Baldwin (1975). As a result of student to student counselling, the number of withdrawals significantly decreased during one semester when compared with the previous semester. The key to this success was attributed to the acceptance of the counselors by their peers, for the student counselor "spoke the same language

and shared the same problems". Similarly, Amster and Harriett (1975) found that students taught by peer tutors achieved more than those taught by specialists or exchange teachers. Reed (1976) claimed that tutoring arrangements which use peers as tutors have resulted in benefits for the tutors,and not just the tutees. The tutors reinforce their own knowledge when they prepare the materials to teach, which in turn enhances their own self confidence and esteem. The tutees receive individualized instruction, have opportunities to interact with students who may have overcome similar problems, and therefore discover and reinforce their own unique strengths. Thus, the tutees receive a boost in self confidence in addition to consistent exposure to a role model.

PT Benefits for Low-Level Tutees

After only 3 months of PT, Collins and Calevre (1975) found that the tutees rate of math achievement ranged from 4.8 months per month of tutoring, to 14.6 months per month of tutoring. In a similar vein, Klann and Harriett (1975) investigated the use of PT to improve the reading levels of pupils eligible for special education services. After 8 months of the PT program, the average improvement was 2.3 years, with 1.7 the lowest advancement, and 3.7 the highest gain.

In further support of the evidence of tutee gains from a PT system, Damico and Watson (1974) found that the students engaging in peer helping relationships had positive gains in school attitudes, peer acceptance, and self-esteem. Cohen and Przybcien (1973) have demonstrated that PT can be an effective technique to remediate negative behavioral characteristics. Their results indicated that impulse children showed a change in response style after viewing their reflective models. The tutees demonstrated a significant increase in response time, as well as a significant decrease in errors. Bandura and Walters (1963) have already noted that similarity between model and observer characteristics can enhance the efficacy of the observer.

Benefits for Tutors

In a study by Ross (1974), significant gains were made by tutors in reading and self concept. The greatest gains were made by the tutors who had been tutees the previous semester. These results strongly suggest the need for a tutor training

program prior to the actual beginning of a PT approach. Indeed, there have been several studies showing academic and self-concept gains for tutors -- (Bremmer, 1973; Conrad, 1975; Raushenbush, 1968; Mohan, 1972; Hamblin, 1972). It is worthwhile to note, that according to Hamblin's data, even the so-called disadvantaged children when given the opportunity to tutor, generally turned out to be effective in tutoring their peers who learned little when instructed by adults. As Coleman suggested (1967), that the most effective teachers of children are often his peers.

Objectives/Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the benefits of PT, a one-to-one learning situation in which one student is the tutor, and the other student is the tutee, on withdrawn and aggressive children. The study focused on 3 hypotheses, 2 directional and 1 non-directional:

(1). Both aggressive and withdrawn participants will show a greater increase in self concept than the control group.
(2). Both aggressive and withdrawn participants will show greater decrease of their specific behavioral problems than the control group.
(3). There will be some differences in gains, both behaviorally and in self concept, from the tutor group to the tutee group.

Design

This experiment was of the randomized block design. The 3 groups consisted of the Tutors, the Tutees, and the Control. Within each group were the following 2 blocks - Aggressive and Withdrawn. Each group of children was randomized independently.

Sampling

The group at large was selected consisting of 60 withdrawn (WI) and aggressive (AG) children, from grades 2-8 at the College Learning Lab on the campus of the State University College at Buffalo. All children were referred initially by their teachers and then verified by the school's guidance counselor. Once the general population was identified, the children from grades 5-8 were randomly placed into 2 categories - Tutors (T) and Control (C). The children from the lower grades were randomly placed into the categories of Tutees (TU) or the Control.

It was assumed that the tutors would find it easier to teach when working with younger students, rather than students from their own grade level. Furthermore,

most of the participants had academic problems as well, and thus there was the danger that the tutors might end up being "taught" by their peers of the same grade level. After randomization, each group had 20 members. The T group consisted of 13 AG and 7 WI; the TU group had 10 AG and 10 WI; and the C group was made up of 11 AG and 9 WI. There was a further breakdown of the PT pairs themselves;

AG tutoring AG -- 7 pairs
AG tutoring WI -- 6 pairs
WI tutoring AG -- 3 pairs
WI tutoring WI -- 4 pairs
Total -- 20 pairs, or 40 participants.

Criterion Measures/Instruments

Self concept was evaluated by a system based on one used by Luszki and Shmuck (1974). On this scale one notes the discrepancies from the child's concept of actual self to ideal self. The following is a brief illustration of the self concept scale:

(Self Concept Scale)

I AM				I'D LIKE TO BE		
Almost Always	½ of the time	Hardly ever	FRIENDLY	Almost Always	½ of the time	Hardly ever
			BORED			
			STUDIOUS			

The author added several terms to Luszki's original list, for it was reasoned that they would indicate important aspects of self concept. Such terms as healthy, bored, close with teachers, close with classmates, etc., were added. To use this scale the child simply checks the appropriate box on each side of the middle terms. The results are measured by adding up the total number of discrepancies (or differences) from the child's "I AM" column to the "I'D LIKE TO BE" column.

An adaption of the Devereaux Elementary School Behavior Rating Scale (DESB) was used to measure aggressive and withdrawn manifestations. In order to make the DESB more specific to this study's needs, and less time consuming for the teachers to fill out, only those cluster items of the DESB which were geared towards picking up on aggressive and withdrawn behaviors were used. The following 4 behavioral categories were used from the DESB; disrespect-defiance; classroom disturbance; inattentive-

withdrawn; needs closeness to teacher.

Teacher questionnaires were sent out at the end of the study to supply further insight and information.

Schedule

After the random assignments were made, the author met with the tutors for two brief training sessions. These sessions were based on practical guidelines suggested by Conrad (1974). The tutors were instructed how to correct in an easy-going manner, and without hostility. Lines such as "try it again", or "let me help you", were role played by the tutors. They were also taught how to reinforce correct statements with responses such as "very good", "great", "good job", etc. The tutors were then informed that they would have free manipulation of the content materials of each PT session. Finally, they were instructed to meet with their tutees as often as possible, and preferably each school day from 20-30 minutes. As the program went on for 5 weeks, each participant was given a maximum of 23 sessions. It is worthwhile to note that when the author first met with the tutors, they were told that they were chosen for this unique position because the administration felt that they would succeed at it. Thus initial contact was in a positive tone.

Results

Results of the DESB -- The experimental and control groups were classified as tutor and tutee groups and, in turn, each of these were classified as aggressive and withdrawn. This resulted in 8 sub-groups. A constant was added to make each gain score positive and all of the scores were ranked in a single series from #1 to #60. The Kruskal-Wallis 1-way analysis of variance by ranks (Cochran, 1956) was used to determine if any of the groups came from different populations. The observed value of H=7.20 was not sufficient to achieve significance (.05 level, df= 7, R: $H \geq 14.07$), so the null hypothesis was retained. In general, however, both tutors and tutees showed higher gains than the control group. 62 percent of the experimental group improved, as compared with only 45 percent of the control group. Although these results were not significant, it was noted that 85% of the WI-T group experienced an increase with the other 15% remaining the same. This would suggest that the WI-T became less with-

drawn and more outgoing when placed in the position of teaching another child. The following table depicts the percentage of gains for each subgroup:

AG-T : 53%
WI-T : 85%
AG-TU: 60%
WI-TU: 60%
AG-C : 40%
WI-C : 55%

A salient point was noted while analyzing the data. The students who made the greatest gains were the ones who attended the most number of PT sessions. The Pearson product moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between the number of times tutors and tutees met, and the criterion measures. Subjects were ranked according to the changes in pre-post test scores, and according to the number of times of PT participation. The observed correlation in the area of behavioral improvement was .80 with a significance level of t= 13.70, (.005 level, df= 38, R: H $\geq$ 2.711). While these results were highly significant, it is impossible to make a determination of cause and effect since other factors, such as pupil motivation, could contribute to the differences. However, these findings indicate that the relationship is sufficiently powerful to justify further studies in the area, which should attempt to control for the participation factor within the experimantal design.

It was further noted that one half of the participants attended less than 10 PT sessions, with 8 subjects attending less than 5 encounters. This might suggest that only a small percentage of the students could handle the apparent lack of structure and high degree of freedom in this particular type of PT arrangement. One would therefore expect the positive results to generalize to the other students if the PT formats were more structured and teacher controlled. This is particularly important for previous studies have expounded the notion of "freedom to manipulate for optimum results", (see Klaus, 1975). However, it is likely that the previous studies dealt with the normal population, while this study was specifically with LBD children, and it is well known that LBD children do need structure.

Results of the Self Concept Scale -- The Kruskal-Wallis 1-way analysis of variance by ranks was used in the same manner to analyze the results of the Self Concept Scale.

The observed value of H= 8.15 was not sufficient to achieve significance (.05 level, df= 7, R: H ≥ 14,07), so the null hypothesis was retained. Here too, as with the DESB, the experimental group showed higher gains than the control group. The following information depicts the percentage of improvements for each subgroup:

AG-T : 69%
WI-T : 42%
AG-TU: 50%
WI-TU: 80%
AG-C : 50%
WI-C : 40%

The Pearson product moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between the number of times of PT participation and the self concept scores. The correlation was .55, which was highly significant with a t= 11.29 (.005 level, df= 38, R: H≥2.711).

Results concerning hypothesis #3 -- There were no significant differences on either of the post test scores between the tutor and tutee groups. Each group experienced an average increase of 62% on both testing devices.

Results of Teacher Questionnaires -- There were 2 reoccurring themes from the teacher's responses. First was the need to have the PT sessions better organized and more structured. Over 75% of the teachers reported that when the tutor made inconsistent and infrequent contact, their tutees often experienced frustration and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, they were somewhat jealous and envious of the children engaging in successful PT encounters. Secondly, the teachers of those children who did manage to participate in more than 15 sessions, reported an "increase in organization and responsibility", "greater interest in school work", and "greater efforts made to complete assignments". These benefits were noted for both tutors and tutees. Finally, all of the teachers declared their willingness and interest to set up another PT system with their pupils, although perhaps with some modification.

Discussion

From all of the above, it seems that inconsistent tutoring is worse than none at all. Those students who experienced erratic PT had the lowest scores as well as experiencing other emotional problems. In addition, they seemed to create more confusion,

rather than assistance,for their teachers. Since all of the teachers backed the idea of PT, the author suggests the need for more direct teacher involvement in supervising the PT sessions. Some children will need only a bit of encouragement to attend, while others will require specific materials to work with each day. It was most encouraging to note the widespread benefits of those children who actively participated. For them, it was not only gains on post test scores, but a very real and positive change was accomplished in their approach to learning in general and themselves in particular.

While there was no significant differences between the PT pairs, perhaps because the N of each subgroup was too small, nevertheless, the AG-AG and WI-WI pairs had the lowest gains. Indeed, the majority of the tutoring pairs showed regression on the post test scores. It was further noted that these pairs attended the least number of PT sessions. It is likely that their behavioral conditions contributed or even caused the poor attendance factor. In other words, when an AG-T meets with an AG-TU for the purposes of learning together, it is reasonable to assume that their behavioral problems act as a double obstacle to the learning process... a sort of "adding fuel to the fire" results. On the other hand, the behaviorally mixed pairs of AG-T and WI-TU, or WI-T and AG-TU, attended the most sessions and made the greatest gains. Here the participants may have acted as complimantary role models for each other. (see Cohen and Przycbien, 1973). The AG-T has to settle down somewhat to reach the WI-TU, and the WI-T has to open up more to teach the AG-TU. These results strongly suggest the need to behaviorally match tutor and tutee for maximum growth.

In conclusion, PT, if properly supervised and controlled, promises to satisfy a vital set of needs with LBD children. It provides an opportunity for direct and healthy exchange with peers; it allows the child to assume a role of giving and resposibility; and it gives the child some long overdue success, without which no learning can take place.

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